



How can schools create a community where all students have an adult they trust?

Champion's Brief #2

What's the Issue?

The enduring demand of the education system is the assurance that instruction is both rigorous and relevant so that all students are ready for whatever future they may have. Yet, when student relationships with peers and adults in the school context are tenuous or absent, opportunities to engage in challenging academic work may be lost. Eclipsing this academic impact is the potential impact on the physical and emotional well-being of a student. Frankly put, when a student's physical and mental well-being is harmed or their future cut short, it matters little how academically prepared they are.

While many instances of trauma and unhealthy life decisions are beyond the influence of the school, school leaders, educators, and other adults in the school can ensure students are seen, heard, valued, and cared for while they are on campus.

This brief explores the nature of adult-student interactions that foster trust, challenging those in the school context to prioritize relationship-building as a fundamental imperative and function of the school.

WHY IT MATTERS TO YOU

- 📍 When schools and districts effectively focus on creating a safe, healthy, and supportive environment, **students are more likely to engage in the curriculum, achieve academically, and develop positive relationships.**
- 📍 When students have a trusted adult in the school environment, the **likelihood of violent incidents significantly decrease.**

Oklahoma Champions

Oklahoma worked with a group of schools to **increase the number of students who report having a trusted adult at school.** Learn more at <http://sde.ok.gov/Oklahoma-Excel>.

Strategy #1 - Implement hallway visibility strategies and greeting protocols with participating teachers.

Strategy #2 - Implement check in/check out programs for students of participating teachers.

Things to Consider

- > **Even when students' lives are challenging, schools can serve as one of the most important stabilizing factors.** Fostering a relationship with students increases attendance and academic achievement, while lowering the chance of violent incidents. Students who perceive their teachers and school administrators as creating a caring, well-structured learning environment in which expectations are high, clear, and fair are more likely to be willing to reach out to adults.
- > **Building productive and supportive relationships with students is not just the job of the classroom teacher.** Having a network of trusted adults is known to be a significant deterrent for mental and physical abuse. Even when abuse does occur, it ends more quickly if the child has a trusted adult. Fostering positive relations with students involves teachers, counselors, principals, secretaries, librarians, cafeteria staff, janitorial staff, coaches, volunteers, etc.
- > **The fast pace of the school day may allow students to slip though the cracks, compounding negative student perceptions of their status in the school.** When students feel disconnected, they believe they do not have peers or adults to turn to when they are confronted with dangerous situations or ideas about self-harm. Even the simple act of checking in on a student when they appear sad, unusually quiet, or after returning from an absence can help students know they matter.

Recommended Actions

- > School leaders can help to make expectations for all adult staff explicit through professional development, staff meetings, and outreach efforts through parent/teacher organizations. See the One Trusted Adult Campaign (<http://bit.ly/champ2-1>) for more ideas.
- > Practice classroom and school-wide routines that are designed to ensure students know each other's names and the names of adults. Having question prompts and sentence stems may create a safe way to practice building relationships until it becomes more natural.
- > Adults who are acting as informal mentors and trusted adults should be thoughtful about how judgmental responses might disengage the student. Practicing responses that are inquiry-oriented can ensure that the conversation remains open.

Attending to Equity

- > In some families and communities, children may be taught not to trust certain adults. Be thoughtful about intentionally connecting students with adults that are comfortable to the student.
- > Some students may not have the verbal skills (in the familiar language to the adult) to express their feelings. Provide opportunities such as drawing, acting, and, when needed, translators to ensure all students are able to connect to adults in the school.

Reflection Questions

- > How has your perspective about your school climate and culture been affirmed or changed since reading and viewing the resources? If so, how?
- > Why is it so imperative to have a trusted adult at school that students feel that they can talk to?
- > Who in your school is already really good at being a trusted adult for students? What can you learn from them?
- > What can you do next week to build trust with students?

ALSO SEE CHAMPION'S BRIEFS:

- #5 Greetings Protocol Strategy Guide
- #6 Checkpoint Chats Strategy Guide



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